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Some of the Best Illinois High School Prose of 1948

Selected by CHARLES W. ROBERTS
University of Illinois

FOREWORD

THE compiler of this collection of student writing must admit that he has not been able to examine all of the best prose produced in all Illinois high schools in the last year. He trusts that the selection he has made from the material submitted is representative of what is being done by the better students in schools throughout the state. It is his earnest hope that teachers and students will accept the challenge which this issue offers and will resolve now to be represented in next year's anthology. All contributions should be addressed to *Illinois English Bulletin*, 204a Lincoln Hall, Urbana, Illinois, and be submitted before January 1. Each manuscript should bear the name of the author, his graduating class numeral, the name of his high school, and the name of his English teacher. No manuscripts will be returned unless they are accompanied by return postage.

Additional copies of this issue are available at twenty-five cents a copy. Teachers and students of composition will find detailed class discussion of the contents interesting and profitable.

C. W. R.

Your Private Sanctuary

Have you ever come home to a room someone else has cleaned up for you? Upon opening your door, you discover that, like the fashions, your dresser has the new look. The lamp has changed sides, and the next time you reach to turn it on, you'll knock your girl's picture to the floor, along with several other treasured trinkets. The little things that were around the edge of the mirror have been neatly piled in the waste basket. With a look of horror you find your desk, night table, and book case have also taken on the new look. To one who is accustomed to reaching in one direction to find books and in another to turn on the radio, it's almost like being forced to live in a new world.

Approaching the helpful person who did the tidying up, you are first inclined to lose your temper, but on second thought you politely thank her, adding that in the future she may kindly forget about your room. Later you quietly set to work placing each familiar object into its proper place, making the room livable again. Soon your well intentioned friend slips up behind you to find you with sleeves rolled up, triumphantly looking over a room with its treasures all restored. Turning around to greet her, you are faced with the question, "Didn't you like the way I cleaned your room?"

—TOM KRAUSS '49

West High School, Rockford
Lois Dilley, teacher

To Wait Or Not To Wait

Our way of life has raised many questions. One of these is whether it took longer to build the Pyramids of Egypt than it takes to attract the attention of one of the salespersons in one of our modern establishments known as the Five-and-Ten. I've often wondered just what training would be required for me to be able to assume that bored look which the clerks display. Personally, I think it is just an outward sign of their ability to sleep while standing. Sometimes I wonder whether mental telepathy would arouse them. I try. Then follows that careless shuffle, which reminds me of a turtle with rheumatism. For plain nervous tension some people gamble, some play with atomic bombs, others dabble in deep-sea diving; but, for me, I'll take the moments of indecision, stimulating feelings of highest elation and blackest despair, while I wait for a clerk's attention in the Five-and-Ten.

—JEANNE BROWN '48

Jacksonville High School
Emma Mae Leonhard, teacher

The Grasping World

Today I clambered up to my favorite limb of the old apple tree. It was spring; and the pink blossoms were sweet, the sky was a startling blue, and the brown earth was fresh. Suddenly this thought struck me: I hadn't climbed that apple tree for more than three years because I'd been so busy hurrying to and fro that there was scarcely time to eat and sleep and much less for an occasional moment of solitude. Since my childhood, the only time I had ventured near that tree was the day I clipped a few sprigs of blossoms to decorate my room. In a way, that one event symbolizes the pattern of my existence today. I race to hack off a few choice items here, dash over there to grab the first-rate articles, and then run off to search for other desirable objects. Never is there enough time to stop to ask myself why I want this or what good that will be—only, "I must get this because if I don't someone else will!"

Maybe this sounds like a case of growing pains, but, up in the tree, just thinking about all the rushing around down on earth made it seem absurd. Competition in athletics, jobs, grades, school activities, and home life has forced my generation to accept the attitude that they must attempt to get ahead of everybody and "make something" of themselves. In this way, everyday life is not something for the participant to digest fully and to enjoy but merely a collection of rewards and honors that he has dashed hither and thither to gather, that they may be displayed before others.

At this point, the wind swayed the limbs of the apple tree; and I glanced down to notice that a young robin fallen from his nest was surrounded by a group of anxious elders. This brought to my mind the regrettable fact that youth educated in this grasping world haven't developed the spirit of co-operation that all in nature need for survival. How can we expect world peace and equality to function if individuals are not trained to consider the welfare of others?

This problem can not be solved by saying, "Athletic competition is bad, and we must eliminate it." Rather, by some other means, we must awaken those misguided and show them the entire problem. It would be helpful if all youth could climb an apple tree occasionally and start thinking about what is happening to their society. However, since everybody can't reminisce in an apple tree, the next best solution would be clear analysis of the problem of extreme competition, followed by individual determination to

change this grasping world to a more co-operative, better functioning place and thus make each day's events worth while.

—DORIS MEENEN '48
West High School, Rockford
Mary I. Carlson, teacher

Knock on Any Door—Motley

Mr. Motley, in brutal, simple words, bitterly indicts society for killing the soul of Nick Romano in *Knock On Any Door*. Nick, who had at twelve wanted to be an altar boy, died in the electric chair at twenty-one for murdering a policeman whom he hated bitterly. This so-called officer of the law had mercilessly beaten the boy when he was picked up on a previous arrest for nothing more than being on the street. When Nick was twelve, his father owned a small, prosperous grocery store. One day Pa Romano lost his store; in a few days the Romanos lived on the poor side of town. Within a year Nick was in reform school. Thus was Nick started on his road to the electric chair.

Mr. Motley's novel ranks high among the popular novels of our day assaulting the shortcomings of society. *Knock On Any Door* is a powerful, moving story of a boy who didn't have a chance to be anything but a criminal. Society has made many laws to punish criminals, but what has it done to prevent crime? Nick Romano's environment was the slums of Chicago. The pool halls, the cheap dives, the prostitutes with beckoning eyes standing under the dim street lights, and the jack-rollers and thieves were all part of Nick's life. He hated the law because of its vicious third-degree methods.

Mr. Motley tells us that children are not morally responsible for their criminal acts. In one of the most powerful passages of his story he says that "Nick Romano is any boy anywhere in the world conditioned and influenced as he has been conditioned and influenced. He is your son or brother or mine. We are, all of us, the net result of our yesterdays. Anyone can reason from cause to effect and know that the crimes of children are really the crimes of the State and Society, which by neglect as well as active participation have made this individual what he is. Knock on any door in the slums of any large city and behind them you'll find thousands of Nick Romanos, boys who've never been given a chance in life."

Mr. Motley has drawn a memorable characterization in Emma. Emma loved Nick passionately when she married him, but her

happiness soon turned to bitter disillusionment. One day Emma, unable to face life any longer, committed suicide. Mr. Motley makes us feel with Emma the agonizing loneliness and heartaches as the idea seeps into her mind that there is nothing left for her since she has lost Nick to the streets of Skid Row.

Yes, *Knock on Any Door* is not a pleasant novel. It is not for those who want to overlook the sordid side of life, the existence of which society is not too eager to recognize. Society's neglect is appalling. In these squalid tenement houses, ugly, miserable dwellings of the slums, live people who have lost the last vestige of their self-respect, individuals living in poverty who will breed many more Nick Romanos, doomed before they are even born. Is this what society wants? That is the question Mr. Motley asks in *Knock on Any Door*. It's up to society to find the right answer.

Mr. Motley has written a fine novel about a pertinent social problem. His novel is one of the great social tracts of our time.

—RICHARD KUMPF '48
Pekin High School
Bernice Falkin, teacher

Strong Men in Gentle Moods

As shown in poems by John G. Neihardt

Listen! Can this be Fink—brawny, rowdy Mike—singing such a mournful song, “. . . a gently grieving thing like April rain”? Yes, it is Mike, the booster, the brave frontiersman, who chants an Irish tune, “. . . that while it wakes old memories of pain, wakes also odors of the violet.”

Even the strongest fighter and the mightiest hunter have their moments of tenderness and wistful longing. Their gentle moods are often disguised behind masks of raucous gaiety, but sometimes one can notice “. . . that angel yearning through.”

Perhaps the most frequent cause of this softness is love. When a rough frontiersman falls in love, *really* in love, the change seems to be even more noticeable than when Cupid lures a more cultivated gentleman into his range. Neihardt's description of the frontiersman lover is this:

But when the twilight came, there fell on him
A sentimental, reminiscent mood,
As though upon some frozen solitude
Within him, breathed a softening chinook,
Far strayed across the alplike years that look
On what one used to be and what one is.

In this fighting, hunting, shooting world of men, women are absent—for the most part—but very much respected. Any crude remark about women calls for a fight, and the challenger does not lack “. . . an open road among the men.”

Not only love for women brings on gentle sentiment but also friendship among men. The Indians do not understand how Mike and Bill can fight and still be friends.

No friend, they said, makes war upon a friend;
Nor does a foe have pity on a foe:
And yet the tall white chief had bathed with snow
The bloody mouth and battered cheek and brow
Of him who fell!

The death of a friend makes even the toughest heart become gentle. After Bill is killed, even Mike, who sought revenge from Carpenter so long “. . . came to look upon that face—and how his shoulders shook with sobbing as he moaned: ‘My friend! My friend!’” The killing of the horse guards is the first loss of life in Major Henry’s band. Unhardened to such experiences, the men lapse into thoughtful moods.

And very few found anything to say
That night; though some spoke gently of the dead,
Remembering what that one did or said
At such and such a time.

Longing for home often comes on men who are so far away from friends and love. As Neihardt puts it, “Could one smell home-smoke fifty years away?” The most gentle moods come in the evenings when the men sit near the hearth and think of the little things back home—“. . . the ripe persimmons falling—*plush!*—upon the leaves . . . cider in the vigor of its prime . . . the back-log’s sputter on the hearth . . . Thus many a lad, grown strangely old, remembered and was sad.”

Story telling is a favorite pastime during the lonely evenings. Hugh Glass is an expert at drawing tears or laughter from the men as he tells his tales of adventure and love. “He spoke unwitting how his passion played upon them, how their eyes grew soft or hard with what he told. . . .”

Goaded on by his dire need, the old “graybeard” decides to kill the ancient Indian crone when he sees her go past with a pack containing, perhaps, “. . . a flint and steel, a kettle and a knife! What did the dying with the means of life, that thus the fit-to-live should suffer lack.” With these he could save his life and the old

woman would never be missed. Yet, it is not in Hugh's character to kill anyone just for his own benefit. His thoughts are shown by Neihardt thus:

Poised for the lunge, what whimsy held him back?
 Why did he gaze upon the passing prize,
 Nor seize it? Did some gust of ghostly cries
 Awaken round her—whisperings of Eld,
 Wraith-voices of the babies she had held,
 Guarding the milkless paps, the withered womb?
 Far down a moment's cleavage in the gloom
 Of backward years Hugh saw her now—nor saw
 The little burden and the feeble squaw,
 But someone sitting haloed like a saint
 Beside a hearth long cold.

“‘Brave men are not ashamed to fear’. . . .” These are Hugh's words, but more can be added to them. Not only are brave men unashamed to fear, but also they are not afraid to be gentle.

—FRANCES COAN '48
 University H. S., Normal
 Ruth Stroud, teacher

Lest We Forget

We lived on the western coast during the war, and in that time much occurred that was different from the routine of peace. First, we started using both sides of theme paper; then there was a shortage of erasers. For a while that was all, until one day it happened.

Our teacher received a letter from the Municipal Superintendent of Schools to instruct us in the practice of air-raid drills. We had to lie prostrate on our stomachs under our desks with our hands protecting our ears and the back of our necks. We were instructed to breathe with our mouths open. At first, we took it all rather lightly but after we were given “dog-tags,” similar to those the G. I.'s wore, we took our air-raid drills more seriously.

Then one day the army put a barrage balloon in a far corner of our school grounds. This was a novelty and really a thrill for us. We had two LONG lectures about “fooling around the balloon.” The gas in it was potent, and if it ever exploded there would cease to be a Curry School.

The day we had our first gas-mask drill was a very solemn day for most of us for we felt that gas-masks meant business.

We had many changes during the war that were odd. There were the double shifts, wooden-soled shoes, a meat-once-a-week-cafeteria, teachers that were here today—gone tomorrow, lack of supplies, and too many pupils.

Much of it seemed like a nightmare; and yet, after our class had visited the navy yard on our fieldtrip, I saw that the human hair and skin, matted to torn masses of metal by big blobs of blood, were real. They were horrible and ghastly. I saw that the stamp drives we had at school each week were part of the thing that meant the end of the war and the beginning of a peace that, we hoped, would be lasting.

I wonder if my children will ever write of their war experiences—or will they survive to tell their tales?

—GEORGIA LEE RAWLINGS '48
Petersburg High School
Mina M. Terry, teacher

Religion and the Peace

In times of peace, people are wont to scoff at religion; but during war, people turn to their religion for help and guidance, and religion takes its rightful place in a world troubled by strife and confusion.

When nation after nation answers the call to battle and when soon the world is aflame, men of the ministry seek to turn their congregations' minds to thoughts of sublime peace brought about by supreme faith and guidance from God. Each minister of the Gospel, whether he be Catholic, Protestant, or Jew, strives for the ultimate truth. Through patience and understanding, the minister, rabbi, and priest endeavor to help every weary soul on to the bright and beautiful path that leads to peace—peace of mind and peace of country. I sometimes wonder why our diplomats don't invite God to Lake Success and ask Him for help in straightening out an altogether too crooked world. I can remember hearing my grandmother say that everyone was invited to the League of Nations except God, and He should have received the first invitation.

Many of our young people today have replaced their childhood faith with doubt and skepticism. For the past decade turmoil has been growing in the world, and nobody can find a solution that will suppress fear and hatred. Since the youths are the victims of

circumstance, why should they believe in a just and kind God? But why doesn't somebody wake up the youth of America and give them the faith they need to believe in a truly compassionate God?

With the outbreak of World War II, religion came into its own. People needed something to give them hope and comfort; they discovered that religion was the only answer. Men in the service who had never opened a Bible now read the Holy Book with interest, finding strength on every page and in every word. It brought comfort to mothers who lost sons, to wives who lost husbands; and it gave strength to women who lost sweethearts. Religion possessed the American people with faith that we would someday win the war. The Bible is a great pillar of strength; throughout the centuries men and women of many faiths, creeds, and colors have found words of wisdom, counsel, and inspiration on its pages.

Religion is meant to be something enduring and everlasting. But why, then, do men regard religion as something that is shoved away in a dark corner and brought out only when it is needed or desired? Religion is useless unless it can be used in our every-day living. It can be applied to personal problems as well as to problems of state.

Our peace plans are being formed now. The world of tomorrow must make religion its fundamental idea—its basis of peace and security. The world needs religion—not the ceremonious kind, but the simple, beautiful religion of our fathers. Fundamental truth is important. To bring about a secure world there must be tolerance—tolerance of all kinds. And if it is used properly, it will be a beautiful element in reshaping the destiny of mankind.

The entire world has crossed the portals of the past, and the door is closed; instead of war there is peace, but let's keep that door closed tightly. Right at this moment we are engaged in a great mortal combat: the war for peace. If we lose, the losses will be great; but if we win, the victories will be many. Losing the peace will mean another war, but if it comes, I only hope that the men and women of this nation will leave an empty chair at the peace table for the Man who holds the destiny of the human race in the palm of His hand.

—MARY JOHNSTON '48
Maine Twp. H. S., Des Plaines
Elizabeth Parolini, teacher

Commencement, June, 1948

Here we are before you, waiting to pass on from these loved halls, to take our places in the world. Here we are, young men and women, a cross section of a great land, a living example of a great ideal. What are we? Yes, I know we all look very much alike under these robes, but we are all different. Let's see. Some of our fathers are rich, some are poor. Some of us are Protestant, some are Jewish, some are Catholic. My skin is white, but that fellow's over there has a yellow tinge. This girl's ancestors came from Germany, and that girl's came over on the Mayflower. As I said before, we are a cross section of a great land, a cross section in which every type of person can be found, a cross section representing a great variety of racial, religious, and social backgrounds.

But that fact alone does not make us a living example of a great ideal. Rather it is the fact that we can work together, that we can play together, that we can live together. Look at any project at Lake View: the Music Festivals, the Assemblies, the Clean-Up Campaigns, the various charity drives carried on throughout the school year. Examine the organizations: the language clubs, the Forum, the G. A. A., the student government, the school newspaper. Go to one of our social affairs: the Cadet Hop, the Council dances, the annual football dance, the Senior Prom, or our newly initiated Junior Prom. Look at our athletic teams; come to a football game and hear one of our cheers. Working together, playing together, living together—that's what makes this small cross section of young men and women so important.

But we are all so different. How can we live together? Well, maybe that's why. Really though, we are not too different. To put Shakespeare into other words, we all bleed when we're cut and we all laugh when we hear a good joke. Of course we are different. Life would be pretty dull if we weren't. You see, we are learning to use those differences to our best advantage. We are all individuals. Before we can live together, we must respect each other as individuals. We all have to realize that we can learn something not only from the teacher, but also from everybody else in a class. We begin to judge a person by what he does and not by what he is. So Jacobs is a Jew! What's the matter with that? He's one of the best basketball guards we ever had at Lake View. So Frank's parents did come from Japan; he certainly can hold his own in a chemistry class! Who cares what he is! It's the fact that he as an individual can do something, can contribute something, that matters.

One starts to mold his own character by practising those virtues that he sees and admires in his fellow classmates. After receiving a variety of different opinions and ideas from these classmates and his teachers, he may attack his problems with an open mind and a clearer perspective. From his personal everyday contacts he should get an understanding of human nature and realize that people are essentially the same. He develops by actual experience an appreciation of values, of the finer things of life, of the simple and lasting things. He develops loyalty, loyalty to the school, loyalty to that which is right, loyalty to his own ideas. And he learns to respect the other fellow's point of view. He acquires self control and a feeling of responsibility and self-government.

And perhaps he never once realizes that he and those about him are living examples of a great ideal. Working for the good of a group, contributing his individual efforts, without losing his individuality, that is the American ideal. That is what our forefathers were thinking about when they drew up the fundamental laws and principles which govern this country, when they wrote:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Here we are before you, waiting to pass on from these sacred halls, to take our places in the world. Here we are, young men and women, a cross section of a great land, a living example of a great ideal. Yes, we are different, all different, and yet we have learned—and are still learning—to live together.

—MORTON TENENBERG '48
Lake View H. S., Chicago
Frieda Topping, teacher

Type Casting: Root of Prejudice

The world has piled up an immense store of literature. We have billions of words written in praise of or against almost everything. We have hundreds of great classics that we call our best. They are the supreme example of our culture. School children study them, memorize passages, analyze the plots, and read them just for entertainment. Yet there is a subtle poison extending through our literature to which even the classics are not immune. It permeates the trashy pulp fiction, the short story, the modern

novel, and even the works of the great William Shakespeare. It has several names. Let's call it "type casting," the practice of letting a race stand for a character.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare presents us with an excellent example of this subtle poisoning in the character of Shylock. Shylock is a "heavy," or villain, filled with a lust for money and an intense hatred for one religion in general and a certain man in particular. The role is a great one, but it is marred by one fact; to place added emphasis on the hateful, money-mad characteristics of Shylock, Shakespeare makes him a Jew. Thus Shylock becomes not a villain, but a representative of a certain race.

This practice is not confined to one book or type of work, nor to one author. You can find type casting in the cheapest novel. You can find it in our best sellers and even in the books our school children study. It isn't confined to one race or religion, either. Jew and Negro, Englishman and Frenchman, Hindu and Arab, all are maligned by our authors, intentionally or unintentionally. How many people think of Frenchmen only as ardent lovers, of Negroes as dumb, servant-type people, of Englishmen as snobs? Yet these are not true pictures. These are distortions formed by the warped mirror of our literature.

The effect of this literature on the public cannot be underestimated. When someone is confronted with the image of a person that is identified with a certain race, that person becomes the race itself. It is a sad but true fact that the public draws its great conclusions from a few scattered impressions. When those impressions are constantly confronting a person, as they do in our literature, the conclusion, whether true or false, is driven home as if by a riveting machine. Soon you have a hateful and completely prejudiced public brought about by the simple act of making a Negro the butt of a joke or an oriental a spy.

Most of this type casting is not done purposely to arouse race prejudice. Our authors could not be that insidious. No, most of this subtle poisoning is done unconsciously with no intent or purpose of evil. Type casting is merely a convenient frame on which to build a character. In the past a member of a certain race has always been represented in a certain way. Therefore, when an author has a character representing certain traditional qualities, he simply makes him a Jap or an Englishman or whatever is convenient. It makes writing the plot that much simpler—and strengthens the hate and prejudice in the mind of every reader.

There are two things that can be done to combat this evil. One is to awaken the reading public to this cesspool of hate. The public

can be taught to recognize type casting when it appears and to fight the influence it can hold. The best place to do this is in our schools. Our citizens of tomorrow are the students of today. If, along with studying *The Merchant of Venice*, the pupils of our schools could study type casting, we would have an antidote. If students would learn the evils of our classics and our literature as well as the good points, it would be a large step in the raising of our so-called culture. The world cannot say, "Ban these books; they are poisonous," but it can teach our youth to recognize and hate this type of characterization for what it is.

The second aim of anyone wanting to destroy type casting is to kill it at its source, in our modern authors. If hate is not fed, it soon must die. The schools must teach our prospective authors to shy away from this kind of device and to build strong, self-sustaining characters.

Some of our modern authors are doing this already. Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* is a fine example of this. There are others, too, but far from enough. We need many more true pictures to combat the mass of hate that race prejudice has wrought, the same prejudice that type casting has brought about. If our modern authors could realize that a story can be just as good while painting a true picture as a distorted one, perhaps we would have more truly fine works. Once more, the school is the place to achieve this.

Through these two points, education, if it so desires, can conquer one of the greatest breeding places of hate; it can rid the world of the insidious practice of type casting and lay a sound foundation for furthering the brotherhood of man.

—WALTER JONES '50
Lyons Twp. H. S., LaGrange
Kay Keefe, teacher

Dunking

A lobby of jealous people have ruled against dunking. A waiter shouldn't dip his thumb in your coffee; therefore, you shouldn't put your fingers in either. It is merely the plot of jealous waiters who dislike our being able to do something they cannot. To discourage the practice and bring us down to their level, they have made the doughnut over into the bagle, a better grade of concrete than is found in most buildings.

They have also hired persons like Emily Post who proclaim that it is a mortal social sin to dunk in public. The disobeying of this

law is sure to result in the outlawing of you and your family. You will be dropped from the Social Register (quite a fall) and will nevermore be mentioned in polite conversation. There are many, however, who continue to dunk as much as they want to. These people either do not care whether or not they are expelled or else they just cannot be dropped (you can't fall from the basement of the social structure).

Dunkers have degenerated into three classes or types: the crude, unpolished kind; the delicate, refined type; and the nervous, furtive type.

The uncouth method of this first group consists of dropping the doughnut into the coffee, and letting it sink out of sight. One hand then dives after it, searching under the surface until it is located. It is then brought to the top, and, if soggy enough, is drippingly conveyed to the mouth.

The next class contains those who quietly, gracefully break the doughnut in half, lick the fingers, and submerge one end of the doughnut in the coffee. This done, they engage the person nearest them in conversation until it dawns upon them that the doughnut is sagging a little too much. They hurriedly pull out what they can, fish the rest out with a spoon, and then begin laboriously transferring small portions to their mouths via the too-small spoon. All this, up to the last graceful wiping of the hands upon the napkin, is done with the little finger at attention.

While the crude type dunks his way out of ignorance, and the socialite because he is superior, the third class dunks in his own way because he is not sure that it is correct and does not wish to be discovered if it is not. He tremblingly breaks the doughnut into several pieces, and hides them behind the cup, hoping no one will notice them. After glancing furtively and, as he thinks, unconcernedly, around the room, he casually drops one hand to a piece of doughnut and picks it up, hiding it between his fingers. Looking fearfully about him, he puts two fingers (from which the piece of doughnut dangles) on the edge of the cup, and seems to rest them there.

When he removes the doughnut, he lifts it out and, again hiding it in the palm of his hand, relays it to his mouth. His hand, of course, gets to be somewhat wet, but this is an occupational hazard and he pays it no mind.

—WILLIAM REED '49
Decatur High School
Helen Gorham, teacher

Le Ciel

The silver sea-plane lay on the grey water like a monstrous winged insect. As it began to skim the length of the lake in gaining speed, the spray whipped up around us and the shore flew by in a green mist. As we finally cleared the water, the sky was ominous, and the sun was a vague glow behind the dirty gray masses of ragged clouds. But suddenly with an unparalleled glory the sun thrust aside the clouds and transformed the scene into a fairyland of beauty. Each shaft of sunlight shone down individually like a golden ribbon falling from some celestial world beyond the clouds. I was in an abstract world and the tiny panorama below the plane bore no relation to it. In a moment it was over, but I shall never forget the loveliness of that scene.

—JOYCE HARLEY '48
Evanston Twp. H. S.
Ralph Potter, teacher

Act IV

An auditorium emptied of its human burden—floor checkered with useless programs—the great veil draped back behind the proscenium arch, revealing an unrehearsed scene—flats, which shortly before framed a dramatic episode, now stacked in mocking piles—properties, suddenly unimportant and meaningless, standing about in disorderly groups—extension cords twisting in and out among the rubble—costumes hanging wrinkled and limp, beckoning to the dead—scattered towels smeared with the souls of non-existent people—forgotten voices mingled the recalled echo of appreciation—Act Four, postscript to the play.

—ALYCE EBBESON '48
DeKalb Twp. H. S.
Louise Nelson, teacher

Dick's Home

The bus stop is only about half a block from our home, and on a clear summer night I could always hear the buses stopping at our corner. The friendly voice of my brother bidding the bus driver a cheery good night always brought to me the thought, "Dick's home." As I lay upstairs in my bedroom, I could always trace his movements from the time he got off the bus until he sat down at the desk in our dining room. First, every night I could hear his footsteps and happy whistle echoing on the clear night air. His shoes climbing the four cement steps up to our front door and the scratch of his key in the keyhole always gave me a sense of comfort. He would open the door, and then I could hear the click of the hall light being turned on. The door would close just loudly enough for me to hear. Next he would open the closet door to hang up his jacket. Sometimes he forgot and closed the door a little bit too loudly. Then he would cross the dining room, throw his keys on the desk, and snap on the desk lamp. Usually the last thing I heard would be the board of the desk sliding out so that he could read the evening paper. Sometimes I could hear a few coins drop on the desk, because my brother is a coin collector and often works on his hobby after work. Finally, knowing that he was home and that all was well, I would drop to sleep.

Before my brother went into the service, I never appreciated this little drama. The first night this happened after his discharge, I knew that it was something I would never forget. Each little motion is so clear to me when I lie in bed listening to him that I can see in my mind every move he makes. Even now, in the winter, I often hear him come home; and I love to listen, never growing tired of it. I'm very proud of Dick since he is my only brother and also my best friend. In later years, when he has his own home, I will always remember the nightly drama of my brother's return from work.

—PAULINE BUSINGA '48

West High School, Rockford
Elsie Beatty, teacher.

Embarkation

This is it at last! The day we're going to leave this so-called country for good old U. S. A. No more sweating out orders! No more long waits in line to be processed for shipment back to the States!

You bound out of your "sack" for the first time since you left basic, with a feeling of cheerfulness and something to look forward to. Quickly you roll your blankets and force them into your already full barracks bag. Next you take off for the mess hall thankful that this will be your last meal of dehydrated eggs and stale cereal. After gulping what is called breakfast you head back for the barracks for a quick wash-up and then you struggle into your pack. Your buddy then says "Let's go," and so, with much grunting and hoisting, your barracks bag is on your shoulder, you pick up your cargo pack and you're on your way.

Upon arrival and falling in behind the marker that says "Cpl." and getting behind a guy named Lewis, from New York, as was practiced days ahead to cut confusion down to a minimum, you answer roll. Now after all the rush there is nothing to do but to sit down and watch the sun come up, the last time you see it on this land. Everybody is chattering about that girl back home, that wonderful wife, or just that new car some lucky person's dad has bought.

At long last the order to move out comes, and you impatiently wait as the first three grades pull out, and finally your turn comes to hoist up and pick up again and head through a narrow pass between two mountains as an officer calls your last name and you reply with your first and middle initial.

It seems as though the "rattler" will never reach Inchon. Once it does, again you get in your right line and place to wait as landing barges take loads out to the ship. A chaplain comes along and wishes you "God's speed" and gives you the disheartening news that you will dock at Saipan, Guam, and Hawaii before you reach the United States, but nothing can dampen the spirits of this gang! Now it's your turn. Over into the boat you make the jump, fearful of the water beneath. Now you're going up the stairway along the ship and you receive your chow card. At last! You're on the way! You're going home!

—RAY LUTHER '48
Joliet Twp. High School
Philena Clarke, teacher

A Christmas Present

Waiting! Waiting! For three days we had waited for something—we didn't know what. It was cold, and the ground was muddy from snow mixed into it by the constant movement of men going back and forth. We were a division of engineers sent forward to help push back the steadily advancing Germans, who had suddenly surprised us by turning on the offensive. Being a mechanized unit, we had moved forward with speed with only a few skirmishes along the way. We had come into a small town and waited for supplies of gasoline when word reached us that we were entirely surrounded by Germans. Evidently, we had advanced through a cleared space in their lines before they closed in. When we realized our predicament, all we could do was dig in and defend ourselves as best we could from all sides. Then the waiting, the tenseness of jangled nerves, the cold and wet, and the approaching Christmas season lowered our morale.

German soldiers were encamped all around us. They were close enough that at night we could hear them talking and see their lighted cigarettes. Each morning they washed their clothes in the freezing river near by and hung them out to dry. We had not enough ammunition to take shots at them. Since we were a small division, they saw no necessity of wiping us out immediately; so they took their leisure and played with us, as does the cat before he devours the mouse. At times Germans would be within two hundred yards of us, teasing us and daring us to waste a shot to fire at them. Since capture was inevitable, the colonel ordered us to destroy all German souvenirs, for the Germans killed anyone found with souvenirs. Previously an American sergeant had been caught with a German Luger and had it rammed down this throat till he choked to death.

Two days had passed, and after continuous shelling our morale was at its lowest point. Some of the boys sat around singing Christmas carols, but most of them were thinking about home or writing letters they knew would never reach their destination. Occasionally a shot would ring out, and a buddy, who had got a bit careless, would get a hole through his head. Yes, this was the way we spent Christmas Eve, in the Battle of the Bulge, cold, afraid, hungry, and thinking of home. When were the Germans going to attack? I wanted to get a few for the guy in the next foxhole who wasn't quite as lucky as I. There was nothing we could do but wait for them to attack. Yes, waiting is funny. You wait for what is sure death, hoping it will never come, but when you know it will, you want to get it over with as quickly as possible.

Night fell, just another night of trying to sleep and at the same time make sure no Germans tried to drop a grenade in my foxhole. Mist covered the ground like a fluffy wool blanket, hiding any Germans crawling too near our lines. It began to rain, although I could not understand how in such cold weather. Our hands were so numb we wondered if we would be able to pull the trigger. All night we prayed. We prayed for help that could never reach us, help that was more than ten miles away. I prayed for the people back home and for the buddy next to me.

Morning came, but it was still dark from the gloomy fog and heavy overcast. "This is my last day," I told myself. "Today they will wipe us out." Suddenly the whole German camp turned into a hornet's nest. Germans hurried about everywhere. "This is it," I told myself; I squeezed my gun and made sure my knife was with me.

"Planes!" someone shouted, "American planes!" Suddenly tiny white dots appeared all over the sky. They looked far away but were surprisingly close. The fog completely confused our sense of distance. Our boys had parachuted into our camp. Our prayers were answered. The Germans were so confused they fired at each other and formed no efficient defense at all. Yes, this was one of the first large daylight parachute attacks ever performed. I owe my life to the Ninth Airborne Division, the best Christmas present I ever received.

—EDDIE VEACH '50
Decatur High School
Helen Stapp, teacher

Stood Up

I combed my hair once more and looked into the mirror to view myself skeptically. The mirror was reassuring. I did look nice. Nothing outstanding, but very nice. Dark hair, brown eyes, a pleasant smile. What more could I expect?

Looking up at the clock, I remarked to myself that it was ten after eight. He was late, but then most boys were. I took one more quick look into the mirror and fluffed my hair around my shoulders.

I went downstairs thinking of the day's happenings. He had come up to me in the hall at school and said that he might be over. That's what he said. I told him that it would be very nice if he would come. It was all very casual, but I was so very sure that he would really come.

It was eight-thirty. Hearing a car door slam, I ran to the window just in time to see an elderly lady descend from a car and go next door.

Picking up a magazine, I flipped through its pages, then put it down again. I went over to the radio and turned it on. It was nine o'clock. "It only happens when I dance with you" was being played. It was beautiful, too tauntingly beautiful. Everything had been too wonderful. Tomorrow I would see him in the halls at school. He would come up to me and snap his fingers and say that he had forgotten or gone out. And I would say that it was a good thing that he didn't come because I had gone to a party. Then we would both laugh.

I went out on the porch, and the sharp autumn air blew my hair back as it carried dusty odors of dying leaves and glowing bonfires. Everything was the same as usual.

—JUSTINE JOHNSON '51
East High School, Rockford
Adele Johnson, teacher

Last Chance

The boy stretched leisurely on one of the park benches supplied by the Board of Directors of Central Park. The warm June sun was soaking into his body; the world was beautiful. His mind was relaxed except for the nagging reminder that this was his last day for complete idleness, the last in which he would have the ability to satisfy any foolish desire. Tomorrow he would begin another six-week cruise polishing brass, swabbing decks, and taking orders on the rolling waves of the Atlantic. But today he was going to have a big day. Yessiree, this was his day to shine! He was going to find a girl, a real knockout, and was going to paint the town redder than a Marine-orderly's service stripes. He glanced around him, taking mental notes on each feminine passer-by. A blonde in a tight-fitting jersey dress strolled past airing a Pe-kingese. He whistled but made no move to rise. Not his type. Then his eyes fell on another girl sitting on a bench cater-cornered from him with her dog. She was small, not a beauty, yet there was something about her that would make any guy go out of his way for a second look. He gazed, then rose and walked over to her bench and stood silently for a moment looking down at her. When she paid no attention to him, he sat down and gave out with a cheerful "Hello." Her head turned; the corners of her

lips curved into a smile; and her hello was as cheerful as his own.

So far so good. Her eyes, he noticed, were a rich brown and dark lashed but sad too—or something. She leaned to pat the large dog affectionately on the head.

"Say, that's some dog you've got there. He's a beaut."

She gave a gay chuckle. "Isn't she? Her name's Duchess. No one ever had a grander dog. I've had her almost eight years now."

This was good, they were talking; but minutes counted if they were to carry out his plans.

"Listen," he said, "don't get me wrong; I ain't just a fresh sailor looking for a pick-up, but this is my last day in the big city. My ship shoves off tomorrow. I want a girl, a nice girl like you to go dancing with me at Roseland, have a big feed at Lindy's, take in a show, and maybe stop at Leon and Eddy's for a late snack. Whatdy'a say?"

She stopped petting the dog. She turned her head slowly and that same grievous stare filled her eyes. What horrible thing could have brought such a look to the eyes of such a girl?

"I'm terribly sorry," she said, and he felt that she really meant it, "but Duchess and I have another appointment. I'd like to go to Lindy's and Eddy's with you but—some other girl will go. You'll have luck, Sailor—better luck the very next time."

She rose, and walked slowly into the afternoon sun. The dog paced by her side.

The sailor made no move to follow. He simply sat and stared after the girl, a tightness in his chest. No, he would not follow, for now he saw what he had missed before, the harness on the seeing-eye dog.

—DONNA MARIE GOULD '49

J. Sterling Morton H. S., Cicero
Marjorie Diez, teacher

The De-Scent of Edward

"Cigarette?"

"Thanks, kid."

The flare of the match printed their faces in the warm darkness. Pap exhaled comfortably and leaned back in the rocker.

"Reckon you come to see Judy?"

Ed squirmed on the porch railing.

"Yes, sir."

The cigarette end glowed brightly as Pap took another drag.

"She ain't here."

Ed scratched his ear.

"She ain't here?"

Pap puffed emphatically.

"She ain't here."

A blurb of faint laughter drifted in from the dark. Ed frowned self-consciously.

"Where?"

"Show."

Ed grunted bewilderedly. For a few moments there was only the hum and murmur of the night.

"She alone?"

"Nope," Pap wheezed.

Something worked around the pit of Ed's stomach.

"Who's she with?"

"Cousin."

There was a soft and lazy rustle among the leaves, a whisper along the grass.

"What cousin?"

"Feller named Bob. Visitin'."

"How long, for?"

"Couple weeks."

Ed mashed his cigarette under his heel.

"Reckon I'll go along home."

"Night."

Ed shuffled down the walk to the Ford. It started protestingly. He prowled down side streets aimlessly, then parked in front of the drug store. As he sipped his coke, he scowled puzzledly at the theater across the street. Saturday night and nothing to do. He wandered down to the band concert. Kids were running all over the green, playing tag and squealing like pigs. At the end of each number, the cars parked along the curb honked their horns in approval.

A whiff of perfume tickled his nose. Someone soft and white had sat down beside him on the grass, carefully arranging her skirts.

"Hi."

The voice was like the perfume.

"Ur, hello."

He was glad it was dark.

"I'm Madeleine Smith. We just moved in. Dad's taking over Harding's Grocery."

There was an uncomfortable silence. She tried again.

"Do you have concerts every Saturday?"

"Uh-huh."

"Can anybody play? I can play a little on the flute. I think it'd be fun."

"Yeah."

"Do you go to school here? What grade you in?"

"Senior."

"I think this is the darlingest little town. Everybody knows everybody. Do you live in town?"

"Huh?"

"I said, 'Do you live in town?' "

"Naw. Few miles out."

"I—," a kid came thundering down on them and with a flying leap and a whoop, cut her words off in mid-air. She fluttered around alarmedly, like a hen, he thought, then settled down a little closer and purred, "Is something bothering you? Maybe," her voice dripped, "maybe I could help."

"Hmmm? Noo, no." The perfume drenched him. "Look. Let's go get a coke or soda or something."

He helped her up, and she didn't let go of his hand.

They entered the light and coolness of the drug store. He looked her over. Not bad. He had half expected to see the perfume. She tried to smile seductively.

They settled in a booth and for a minute or two there was nothing but the slurp and gurgle of soda crawling up the straws. Ed had a little trouble trying to separate the flavor of the soda from the flavor of the scent.

"Do you have any celebration for the Fourth of July here? Parades, fireworks?"

"Oh, community picnic, a few fireworks, — Say!" An idea jumped like popcorn in his head. He'd show Judy. He gave Madeleine another appraising look. "Can you square-dance?"

"Why-yy, a little." She smiled encouragingly.

"Well, look. There's this picnic on the green, and then square-dancing and eating and fireworks all night. Want to go with me?"

"I'd love to. Oh, this is going to be fun."

Like heck, he thought.

He walked her home. Her "good-night" oozed through the air like thick syrup.

The sun was beginning to roll out of sight over the horizon when Ed pulled up by the green. Benches and tables were scattered all over, and a chatter of talk drowned out the band. Near the bandstand, a platform had been set up for dancing. Streamers everywhere.

"Step on it, Ma. She can't wait all night."

"Just hold your horses, Ed. I've only got two hands."

Ma unloaded the supper while the kids scampered off over the green, and Pa, his brow creased with thought, weightily discussed hog prices with a neighbor. Ed nervously patted his plastered down hair. Finally Ma finished, and Ed roared off.

Madeleine was wearing a flower in her hair and a flimsy white thing that passed for a dress. She reeked. "My gosh," thought Ed.

As they drove back to the green, Madeleine chattered aimlessly and Ed felt sorry for himself. If only it were Judy!

"I like your shirt, Ed."

How much did he have to endure?

"Isn't it a lovely evening?"

Was it worth it, to spite Judy? At least he wouldn't have to be alone with Madeleine in the crowd.

He parked the car, and they started to look for his folks. There was a continual banging of small firecrackers, and she would jerk startledly towards him at each bang. People were milling about like cattle.

"Hi, Ed." Ed swallowed. Judy stood before him, a brunette dream. In the fading light Ed couldn't decide whether she smiled or grimaced at the first whiff of the potent gas.

"Uh, hi, Judy. This is Madeleine," gesturing with his thumb. Madeleine simpered and moved possessively closer to Ed. This time he was certain that Judy smiled. He was so much fresher and cleaner somehow than the clinging scent-dispenser at his side.

"Well, see you later at the platform," and she was gone, taking her clearer atmosphere with her. Suddenly he remembered that he had forgotten to be angry with her, and groaned.

Ed wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

They finally stumbled on his clan and kinsmen or a portion thereof. Perhaps tripped over would be a more exact description of the action whereby Ed's little brother managed to so place himself as to deposit Madeleine neatly in Ed's arms. A trifle flurried, she recovered herself and her dignity. A flurry of exclamations and introductions accompanied the touching scene of family reunion, and the supper rapidly began to disappear.

Blue dusk sifted silently over the banqueters. The darkness was punctuated by staccato bursts of flame and the equally brilliant streaks of crimson that were Madeleine's lips.

The after-dinner feeling was creeping insiduously over the crowd when lights flashed on the platform, fiddles tuned up screechingly, and the caller yelled, "Sets in order!"

"Let's go!"

"Grab your honey, gents, and set up the squares. One more couple here!"

Hands began to clap and toes to tap in time.

"Allemande left with the old left hand:

Back to your partner with the right and left grand."

Judy was with someone tall and dark—not handsome—that must be her cousin.

Madeleine, he noticed, was staring puzzledly at Judy's partner also.

"First couple lead out down the valley:

Circle four to left and to the right . . ."

When he got close to Madeleine he held his breath to keep from choking. A dense cloud of perfume seemed to envelop the square.

"Now you swing the girl from the valley.

And you swing with your Red River girl . . ."

And he'd looked forward to the Fourth, planning on a date with Judy. He hoped she was miserable too. But she wouldn't be, not with that Bob. Madeleine was still staring at Bob. Someone else for a change.

"Promenade eight till you get straight.

And everybody swing!"

The fiddles screeched to a stop and couples teetered towards the benches. Madeleine collapsed, as had her makeup, and fanned herself feebly.

"I'll go get some cokes to cool off," panted Ed, and, with an excuse, got out of the vicinity for a breath of fresh air.

The squares were forming again when Ed battered his way back to the platform.

"Madeleine . . . hey?" She wasn't there. He glanced over the platform. She was talking with some tall dark guy who held one arm protectively around her. They were cooing at one another, their eyes drooling. "Sucker," thought Ed and gleefully resigned himself to his fate.

Suddenly he stopped and looked again. He'd swear that animated telephone pole was the Bob that Judy had been with. In that case . . . he started looking for Judy.

He found her munching a hamburger and trying not to look hurt.

"Hi," he grinned. "He passed you up, eh? I mean up," he added, with a gesture descriptive of Bob's height. "So'd mine." She didn't laugh.

"Your date, he says, is an old flame of his. That sorta leaves us both out. But," she looked at him, "I really don't mind. Have a bite? No onions." She raised the hamburger.

He sank his teeth in and looked up, over the hamburger, to her eyes.

She was smiling at him. His heart popped into his throat. He swallowed it.

Brushing a smoky curl off her cheek, she offered, "Have another bite."

He did.

He realized suddenly that the music had stopped and the dance was over. Faintly came the call. "Set 'em up folks!"

Turning, he saw that Judy had the same idea. He laughed and grabbed her hand. "Come on, Honey, you're dancing this one with me!"

—RONALD DICKSON '48

York Comm. H. S., Elmhurst
Eleanor A. Davis, teacher

Return

Bill Taylor lay in bed waiting for his son to return home. It was a hot night. He heard the soft, even breathing of his wife in the adjoining bed. He heard a breeze flutter the leaves in the tree outside the window. He looked at his watch—five minutes to twelve.

He was a fool, he thought, for worrying. Mike was nearly eighteen, big, almost a man. He would be all right. Every boy, he supposed, went through this. It was all part of the cruel business called growing up.

He wished Mike would return. He wouldn't be able to go to sleep until he heard the car come into the driveway, and Mike go into his room.

Earlier—when Taylor returned from his office at six o'clock that evening—he had kissed his wife and said, "What's the matter?"

"It's Mike," she explained. "Margie called and broke the date to go to the dance with him."

"Oh," Taylor said. "Where is he now?"

"Out back," his wife replied.

"Too bad, I mean about Margie breaking that date."

"It's just as well," she answered. "Mike was getting too serious about that girl."

"I think he was in love with her."

His wife laughed. "Bill, he's only seventeen!"

"You can be in love at seventeen," Taylor said. "You can be terribly in love at seventeen."

"Oh?" his wife said, "I didn't know you when you were seventeen."

Later at the dinner table—

"May I use the car tonight?" Mike asked in an uneven voice, looking at his plate.

Taylor answered, "Sure. Put some gas in it, will you?"

He reached into his pocket and handed his son a five-dollar bill.

Mike took it without speaking and left.

"I'm not fooling him," Taylor told himself. "He knows why I gave him the five. As if fifty or a thousand would make him feel any better tonight."

Bill Taylor lay in bed waiting for his son to return. Where had he gone? Out on the highway, probably. Driving alone—alone. His heart ached for the boy. "Take it easy, Mike," he said in his mind. "It's something we all have to go through—sooner or later."

He hoped Mike would not speed. He had a brief, horrifying vision of the car careening from the highway, smashing into a tree. He looked at his watch—twelve-thirty.

He heard the car come into the driveway. He felt his body loosen, relax, and sink into the bed. He laughed silently. He had been a fool,

He locked his fingers behind his head, waiting for the sound of his son mounting the stairs. He heard the garage doors open, and, in a moment, close. He waited.

Slowly, he felt his body tense. Fear crept into his stomach and lodged there—an icy, sickening lump. He swung his legs out of bed and felt with his feet for his slippers. He sat on the edge of the bed, straining forward, listening. All at once he was certain—the faint hum of an engine. The car engine, behind closed doors—and Mike slumped over the wheel.

With a violent, hysterical motion he sprang across the dark and silent room. He bounded noiselessly down the stairs, threw

the bolt on the kitchen door and sprang into the moonlit night. He felt the cool grass beneath his feet. He paused, gazing hypnotically at the garage. He dashed across the lawn.

Then he saw Mike's figure on the grass.

He stopped and walked slowly toward the boy, lying face downward on the grass. He sat down beside him.

"Hot night," he said finally.

"You know, Dad, I thought it all out and I think I'll be all right now. In class at school the teacher said, 'Scar tissue is stronger than just plain skin alone.' Sure, Dad. I'll be all right now."

—CHARLES EVERETT '49
DeKalb Township H. S.
Bertha Musick Rutledge, teacher

Christmas Is

Ritchie lay in the shade in the rear of the hotel which looked out on the water. Through the openings in the concrete wall which protected the esplanade from the spray he could see the blue Caribbean and the long breakwater peopled with sea gulls. The sea was empty of ships and stretched endlessly to the north, the point to which his woeful gaze had been directed for the last half hour. Yes, it really was the north, although it was most confusing. Before starting on this trip to Panama with his parents he had carefully scanned the map of the Canal. He had learned that when they arrived at Colon, which is on the Atlantic side, due to the peculiar twist of the isthmus, they would be exactly twenty-two miles west of the Pacific. Why only last night in this queer upside-down country he had actually seen the sun set in what should have been the east.

The boy was entirely oblivious to the beauty surrounding him. Stretching as far as the eye could see, perfectly matched royal palms marched in twin rows on either side of the stark white building. Great vines of bougainvillea dripped their red and purple clusters over the balconies as though begging for more attention than their ground floor neighbors, the flaming hibiscus hedging the milky walks. The sun was low in the sky and soon there would be a repeat performance of the strange phenomenon of the night before. Suddenly, without warning, it would sink into the sea, leaving no twilight but bringing a desolation to Ritchie as dark as the night itself.

For when the sun had disappeared into the waves, it would really be Christmas Eve.

It had seemed a glorious adventure to leave his school four days early and fly to a strange land for a two weeks vacation. The whole class was both thrilled and envious, and Ritchie had strutted for days in the center of a curious and respectful circle. Imperative business had forced his parents southward and he had happily joined them in the prospect of the plane trip in preference to spending the holidays with his grandmother on the farm. He closed his eyes to visualize the farm at this season.

It is difficult to imagine what emotions rule a ten-year-old boy at Christmas time. To an adult the full meaning of the season dominates the consciousness—the story and the miracle of Christ's birth—the spirit of giving—a new hope repeated yearly. But a boy who has outgrown Santa and the confused excitement of the day is still groping between the spiritual and the entirely material. Just now Ritchie was seeing trees. Not the puny little green thing his mother had produced this morning from the trunk saying, "Look, Ritchie, I brought a tree. We will have a little Christmas here." The trees he was visualizing were big trees, the tall stately pines of the Wisconsin farm—thick spruces covered with snow, covered with tinsel. Christmas was insipid here! How could one have Christmas without snow and skates and sleigh rides? How could one have Christmas with stunted trees imported for the day? The musical notes of a horse-drawn carrametta and the clop clop of hooves on the pavement outside the gate drew him from this sad reverie. He was no longer alone. Two blue eyes of the north met the gaze of the two large soft brown orbs of the south.

The boy, José, was Ritchie's age, the son of the hotel gardener. The two had become acquainted the day before—José pronounced with an "H." Something else peculiar in this forsaken land!

"Hello, José," greeted Ritchie listlessly.

"Buenas Dias, Senor," responded José with great respect. His brown eyes sparkled. "Senor Ritchie, come. I show. Mi padre and I feex."

Without enthusiasm Ritchie got to his feet and silently followed the boy. There was no sense in brooding. He was stuck here now—one entire Christmas wiped out completely. He knew he was suffering intensely from homesickness. Good old American homesickness spelled not with a "J" but with a great big capital "H."

Through the brilliant walks of the garden they marched in silence. The heavy sweet scent of the gardenias which formed the

setting for the fountain reached his nostrils and made him think of the perfume counters in the busy stores back home. He thought of the bustling toy departments and the red-coated Santas ringing their bells on the corners in the snow.

Then suddenly they were out of the garden and into a patio upon which fronted a little stone church. The six o'clock vesper bell chimed above and José made the sign of the cross. Ritchie did likewise and noted that the tones of the chimes were exactly the same as those at home, and a little of the heaviness eased out of his heart. A few more steps and they entered a grove. José stepped aside but it took Ritchie a few seconds to accustom his eyes to the interior dimness. Unbelief and awe masked his face. Someone must be playing a trick on him! Surrounding the little space were trees, but such trees as Ritchie had never seen before. Towering over his head, their branches spreading in every direction, brilliant poinsettias moved slightly in the trade winds. Ritchie glanced downward. The thick trunks were neatly anchored in the earth. Why this couldn't be! The poinsettia was a little tree—a mere plant. They came from the florist at Christmas planted in pots, encased in fluted crepe paper and tied with silver bows. Yet here they were, thriving tall in all their mature glory after many years of uninterrupted growth in perpetual warmth. At home, big spruce and stunted poinsettias which lasted only the season. Here, tiny spruce and large poinsettias. Suddenly the universality and full import of the day dawned on Ritchie. Each country had its own way of welcoming the Prince of Peace and this country was blessed in that the Day fell in the season when nature was in its most glorious state. No need for tinsel or bright red balls. The welcome to the Infant grew straight from the earth in a riot of color which no artifice could imitate. He turned to José and found him standing near a crèche, a look of profound pride and joy on his little brown face.

"Each year we feex," whispered José.

The scene had been executed with great realism. No stark abstract sculpture here like that which was the vogue in the northern cities. The little carved figures seemed endowed with life, each feature molded perfectly with an artist's touch. They were clothed in real garments after the custom of the country—homespun for the central figures and tiny jewelled robes for the kneeling kings. In the background stretched a seemingly endless panorama of country-side hills, houses and trees. Instinctively the two boys knelt. Ritchie's blond head shone bright beside the black curls of José.

A grimy hand touched Ritchie's arm. "Es Jesus."

"Is Jesus." He too said it with an "H" and it sounded soft and sweet.

"Es Navidad."

"Christmas is," sighed Ritchie.

—PATRICIA TAGLIABUE
Trinity High School, Chicago
Sr. Augustine, teacher

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